


An  
Introduction  
to  
the  
Underground Railroad

by  
Suzanne Pennington  
Primary Teacher  
Kenton Elementary  
Kenton County Schools  
Independence, Kentucky




**Subject:**  
Social Studies

**Topic:**  
An exploration of the choices enslaved families made in order to be able stay together and the people who helped them via the Underground Railroad.

**Grade Level:**  
First grade+

**Unit/Lesson Length:**  
5 x 40 minute lessons



**Objectives:**

Through children's literature, students will explore some basic information about:

- ◇ Slavery in America
- ◇ How slavery affected enslaved families.
- ◇ The choices enslaved families made in order to be able to stay together.
- ◇ How enslaved families or family members escaped slavery in order to be free.
- ◇ How the Underground Railroad Movement enabled families to be together and to be free.



### Kentucky Core Content:

Culture and Society:

SS-E-2.3.1 Social institutions (i.e. family) respond to human needs, structure society, and influence behavior.

History:

SS-E-5.1.1 History can be understood by using a variety of primary and secondary sources.



### Context/ "The Big Idea"

Many years ago, a lot of Africans were forced to come to America. They were made to work very hard for no money. These enslaved families had to make difficult choices in order to stay together. There were risks if they stayed with their slave owners and risks if they tried to escape for freedom. Many people, both black and white, helped enslaved people escape to freedom via the Underground Railroad.



### Materials:

1.

QuickTime™ and a  
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

*. . . If You Lived When There Was Slavery in America*  
(Paperback)  
by Anne Kamma, Pamela Johnson

2.

QuickTime™ and a  
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

*Almost to Freedom* (Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor Book)  
(Hardcover)  
by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson, Colin Bootman (Illustrator)

3.

QuickTime™ and a  
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

*Freedom River* (Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor Books)  
(Hardcover)  
by Doreen Rappaport "BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR, Kentucky was a  
slave state and Ohio a free state..."

4.

QuickTime™ and a  
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

*If You Traveled On The Underground Railroad* (Paperback)  
by Ellen Levine, Larry Johnson

5.

QuickTime™ and a  
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

*His Promised Land: The Autobiography of John P. Parker, Former  
Slave and Conductor on the Underground Railroad*  
by John P. Parker, Stuart Sprague, Stuart Seely Sprague (Editor)  
"THIS IS THE story of John Parker of Ripley, Ohio..."

6. *Rabbit Ears: Follow the Drinking Gourd* (1992)  
VHS  
~ Morgan Freeman
7. Chart Paper and markers
8. Pencils & paper for students
9. Teacher-prepared learning logs with writing prompts
10. Large classroom map of the World
11. Sentence strips for vocabulary words

---

## Background Information & Teacher Resources

1. **Kentucky's Underground Railroad**  
<http://www.ket.org/underground/>
2. **The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center**  
[www.freedomcenter.org](http://www.freedomcenter.org)
3. **National Geographic – Journey with Harriet Tubman**  
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/features/99/railroad/j2.html>

---

## Procedures:

Day One:

1. Begin KWL chart entitled "Slavery." When completing the "know" section, address any misperceptions as necessary. Prompt responses with following questions:
  - What is a slave?
  - Who were slaves in America?
  - What did slaves do?
2. Read aloud carefully pre-chosen selections from pages 12 & 13 of . . . *If You Lived When There Was Slavery in America*. Use large world map to show Africa and America.
3. To define the term "slave", read aloud the second and last paragraphs of the introduction on pages 6 & 7.
4. Read aloud selected sections from the following headings, pausing for discussion as necessary:
  - Where did American slaves live? (page 14)
  - What was a cabin in the Quarters like? (page 16)
  - Where would you sleep? (page 17)
  - What would you wear? (pages 20-21)
  - What would you eat? (page 22)
  - Would you live with your father and mother? (page 24)
  - What if you father belonged to another slave owner? (page 25)
5. Add to the "learned" portion of KWL.

## Day Two:

1. Review information on KWL chart.
2. Begin with a discussion prompted by the question:  
What do you think it would be like to be a slave?
3. Pass out copied sections of . . . *If You Lived When There Was Slavery in America* pages 35-40. Draw students' attention to the text headings and read together the sections entitled:
  - What kind of work did slaves do?
  - Did slaves have to work very hard?
  - Did the children have to work?
4. Add to the "learned" portion of KWL chart.

5. Students complete a learning log with the prompt: *What I have learned about slavery in America* using labeled pictures and/or sentences to reflect upon what they know and have learned so far.

### Day Three:

1. Remind students that slave owners would often split up families. Ask them to imagine the following scenario:

You are an enslaved child scrubbing the floors in the Big House. You overhear your “master” and his wife talking about how they plan on selling your mom. What would you do?

2. Explain that the book you are going to read to them is about what one enslaved family did when they became worried that they would be split apart. Read aloud *Almost to Freedom* by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson.
3. Lead a whole class discussion on the book.
4. Explain to students that many enslaved people and families chose to try to escape to freedom. Introduce vocabulary on sentence strips:
  - Underground Railroad
  - Conductor
  - Passenger
  - Stations
  - Route

### Day Four:

1. Review vocabulary from previous lesson.
2. Create a web with “Underground Railroad” in the center with the rest of the terms connected.
3. Read aloud sections from ... *If You Traveled On The Underground Railroad* by Ellen Levine, Larry Johnson.
4. Students help define each term. Record their definitions on the web.
5. Explain that you are going to read a nonfiction book about a real-life conductor named John Parker and the one of the times he bravely rescued an enslaved family from Kentucky. Show

students on a map where Ripley, Ohio (near Cincinnati) and Maysville, Kentucky are located. Read aloud *Freedom River* by Doreen Rappaport.

6. Discussion questions:
  - What do you think it felt like to help the family escape?
  - What do you think it was like to be the family that was escaping?
  - Why would John Parker want to help people escape to freedom?


### Day Five:

1. Explain to students that they will be watching the video version of the book *Follow the Drinking Gourd*. Ask them to keep the following questions in their minds as they watch:
  - Would you try to escape if you were a slave?
  - Would help someone escape?
2. Ask students to complete the following learning log as a reflection and response to the books they have heard read aloud and the video they have watched.
3. Provide students with the criteria/checklist to self-assess their final learning log.



## Student Assessment

Final Reflection/Learning Log: use the criteria/checklist provided to the students.





Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Underground Railroad Learning Log

People and families had to make some difficult choices when there was slavery in America. What would you do?

- A. Circle to show what you would do.
- B. Explain your answer with words and/or labeled pictures

1. If my family and I were enslaved, I would:
  - a. try to escape to freedom
  - b. stay with my slave owner

Because \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

2. I would:

a. help enslaved people escape to freedom.

b. not help enslaved people escape to freedom.

Because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Criteria/Self-Check for Final Learning Log

### Question 1:

\_\_\_\_\_ I circled my choice.

\_\_\_\_\_ I explained my choice with words and/or  
labeled pictures.

\_\_\_\_\_ My answer makes sense.

### Question 2:

\_\_\_\_\_ I circled my choice.

\_\_\_\_\_ I explained my choice with words and/or  
labeled pictures.

\_\_\_\_\_ My answer makes sense.